

APPLICATION

FOR

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TITLE: SHARING WEB SESSIONS

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SHARING WEB SESSIONS

Background

This invention relates generally to establishing web sessions.

5 A session is a data stream from a content server. Conventionally, a client, connected over a network such as the Internet, accesses web pages on a web server. The client does this by making a hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP) request to a server that responds with the requested
10 information. As a result, a web session is established which conventionally is a private session between a single browser client user and the addressed web server.

Users may need help in connection with various web sites or web pages. Generally, when the user needs help,
15 the user may operate a soft help button and receives, in effect, pre-prepared information. Alternatively, the user may contact the web site provider, for example, over a telephone or electronic mail link. In many cases, the web site provider has a large number of web pages and may be
20 uncertain exactly which web page the user has concerns about. In many cases, the web site provider provides assistance to the web page user without viewing the web page or without a complete understanding of the precise nature of the user's problem.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a schematic depiction of one embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a chart showing a process in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 3 is a flow chart for software on a proxy device in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention; and

Figure 4 is a screen display in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

Detailed Description

A network 10 for establishing a session may include a browser client 12 communicating over a network such as the Internet 14 with a web content server 22. The communication between the client 12 and server 22 may be via a proxy 16 which during normal communications is a completely transparent communication path. In other words, prior to the occurrence of a trigger event, the proxy 16 may do nothing, in one embodiment, other than to merely transfer communications between the client 12 and the server 22. Thus, a session may exist between the client 12 and the server 22 which is substantially unaffected by the proxy device 16.

The proxy device 16 may be a processor-based system in one embodiment of the present invention. Thus, the device 16 may include its own processor and may be coupled to a

storage device 18. The storage device 18 may be any of a variety of known storage devices such as a hard disk drive or a flash memory, as two examples. Software 20, for controlling the operation of the proxy device 16, may be
5 stored in the storage device 18. The proxy device 16 may include a proxy engine that will be described in more detail hereinafter. The proxy device 16 may be a dedicated use inbound proxy in one embodiment.

The proxy device 16 may be coupled to a shadow browser
10 24. The shadow browser 24 may be a client processor-based system in one embodiment.

The proxy device 16 and shadow browser 24 are on the server side of the client server communication protocol with respect to the network 14. Thus, the proxy device 16
15 and the shadow browser 24 may communicate through a relatively high bandwidth connection compared to the connection between the Internet 14 and the browser client 12.

Turning next to Figure 2, the client 12 may access an
20 Internet web page by requesting the web page as indicated at 1. Thus, the client 12 requests the web page from the server 22, for example, by making a HTTP request that travels over the Internet 14. This request may pass unaffected through the proxy device 16 to the content web
25 server 22. A result is returned from the web server 22 to the browser client 12 via the same logical route. In such

case, the proxy device 16 has no affect on the web session which proceeds between the client 12 and the server 22.

However when a trigger occurs, the proxy device 16 intercepts the web page in the form of a data stream and
5 maps the client browser address to a virtual proxy address as indicated at 3. The proxy device 16 also adds the shadow browser client address to a proxy address table for that session's address. The proxy device 16 may also forward the domain cookie information refresh instruction
10 requests to a listener on the shadow browser client 24 as indicated at 5.

The shadow client browser 24 then sends a refresh request as indicated at 6. As a result, the shadow client browser 24 and client 12 both display the same web page.
15 Optionally, a chat client session may be invoked between the various session participants which include the client 12, the server 22 and at least one shadow browser 24.

The trigger event to initiate the session sharing may be a request from the user invoked from code on the client
20 12. Alternatively, the trigger may be the result of an embedded web page function. For example, referring to Figure 4, a help icon 65 may be maintained on the web page 60. When the user clicks on the help icon 65, a code may be generated which may be intercepted by the proxy device
25 16 to initiate session sharing. As still another example, the session sharing may be invoked via an automated call

from the web content server 22. As one example, when the number of data entry errors detected by the server 22 exceeds a predetermined limit during a single web session, the proxy device 16 may be automatically triggered.

5 In one embodiment a secure transaction may be implemented, for example using a modified secure socket layer (SSL). SSL may be implemented in the proxy device 16 by renegotiating sessions between the proxy device 16 and the server 22 and between the proxy device 16 and the
10 client 12, with the proxy device 16 translating for device 16-client 12 and device 16-server 22 transactions.

Where the proxy device 16 and server 12 have a trusted connection, translation may not be needed in device 16-server 22 transactions. In general the proxy device 16
15 needs a certificate with any server 22 it interacts with. Thus, a SSL proxy may be useful in some situations to negotiate sessions where a pre-existing relationship was not already established.

Referring to Figure 3, the proxy software 20 stored on
20 the proxy device 16 storage 18 begins by detecting the occurrence of an event as indicated at diamond 26 in one embodiment of the present invention. When an event is detected, the requested web page is intercepted from the web server 22. The client address is then mapped to the
25 proxy device 16 as indicated in block 30. At this point, the server 22 believes it is communicating with the client

12 but instead is actually communicating with the proxy device 16. The proxy device 16 then communicates or establishes sessions with both the client 12 and one or more shadow browsers 24.

5 To implement multiple sessions, the shadow browser 24 address is added to a proxy address table as indicated in block 32. A refresh request is then forwarded to the shadow client as indicated in block 34. When the client 12 initiates the refresh request, the shadow browser 24 then
10 displays the same web page displayed by the client 12.

As one example, a help session may be initiated. Help desk personnel, managing the shadow browser 24, see the same web page as the user of the client 12. The help desk personnel may thereby provide more effective assistance to
15 the user. As still another application, one may invite registered shadow browser users into a shared browser session. Each member of the session may have the ability to navigate for the group among any desired web pages or by defining a view only status within the address mapping
20 thereby enabling some active and other passive browser participants. A termination status setting may be set as well. As one example, a setting may determine whether the session is automatically terminated when the initiator leaves the session or when the last participating browser
25 leaves the session.

By putting the device 16 which initiates the session sharing on the server side of the network 10, bandwidth may be conserved. This placement avoids encroaching on the more limited bandwidth constraints of the typical browser user when compared to remote control where client is just remoting software.

Referring to Figure 4, the web page 60 may include a variety of information 62 and 64 to be completed by the user. Once the shadow browser 24 is sharing the session with the client 12, a chat session may be initiated. For example, the user may ask a question 68 and the help desk personnel manning the shadow browser 24 may provide an answer, as indicated at 70, while viewing the same web page that the user is viewing.

While the present invention has been described with respect to a limited number of embodiments, those skilled in the art will appreciate numerous modifications and variations therefrom. It is intended that the appended claims cover all such modifications and variations as fall within the true spirit and scope of this present invention.

What is claimed is: